

10/5/2023 Rider Experience and Operations
Committee Meeting Written Public
Comment Submissions

Submissions

<i>Jack Whisner</i>	2
<i>Stephen Fesler</i>	2

Jack Whisner

ST Board and Rider Experience Committee,

ST, yes please implement the East Link starter line and Lynnwood Link.

Please consider running each of them more often with shorter trains. Intending riders dislike waiting most of all. In ridership forecasting, the coefficient for waiting is relatively large.

Please study running the East Link starter every five minutes with one-car trains.

Please study running the 1 Line with three-car trains and a shorter headway. In staff briefings between April and September, the projected 1 Line headway has increased to 10 minutes from eight minutes. This is the wrong direction. If the trains were shorter, the LRV needed for gap trains would be two fewer. Staff explained an LRV shortage.

The service plan addresses bus routes on page

20. See: https://www.soundtransit.org/st_sharepoint/download/sites/PRDA/ActiveDocuments/Report%20-%202024%20DRAFT%20Service%20Plan%20Phase%20One%20-%20Rail%20Service%20Plan%2010-05-23.pdf

The passage on Route 566 is in error. Most current riders are oriented to BTC and would NOT be forced to transfer if Route 566 was truncated at downtown Bellevue. Riders continuing to Overlake could use Link. Link also serves other useful markets to which south King County riders may wish to access. Rather than save Route 566 resources, they could be reused on a more frequent but shorter route; that would reduce waits for those oriented to Renton or Bellevue.

Thank you for considering this note.

Jack Whisner

Stephen Fesler

This comment included a supplemental document which is included at the end of this

Dear boardmembers:

I believe the agency is going the wrong direction on its fare strategy process. Getting the Link fare structure right is critical. Unfortunately, the agency is only testing two approaches: distance-based fares and flat fares. Distance-based fares are fairer but way too complex. Flat fares are simpler but quite regressive and inequitable. Sound Transit should be pursuing zone-based fares which is a middle ground and scalable for regional equity. I have an [article](#) that explains how Sound Transit could do this. Please reconsider the strategy before it's too late.

Kind regards,
Stephen A. Fesler

Sound Transit Weighs Two Link Fare Reforms, But a Third Is Needed

By Stephen Fesler - September 27, 2023



A Link train at Columbia City Station. Rainier Valley riders would see higher fares and bear the brunt of Sound Transit's flat fare proposal. (Ryan Packer)

Fares on Link are poised to increase, but Sound Transit is evaluating two different fare structures. The agency should be considering a third.

Sound Transit is moving forward with alternative changes to Link fares in response to [light rail expansions](#) on the horizon and the fact that agency policy ordinarily would have required a fare increase by now to maintain the 40% farebox recovery target. The agency is considering two very different fare structure approaches, either as flat fares or distance-based fares. Zone-based fares, however, are not under consideration but could be a valuable alternative for most riders.

Regardless of which fare structure Sound Transit chooses, the agency will maintain reduced fare categories for people who are disabled, seniors, or low-income. Youth riders will also continue to ride free.

All scenarios assume some effective fare increase to partially keep up with inflation and reach a particular farebox ratio target, but [agency staff have indicated that the days of 40% farebox recovery are gone](#). Sound Transit boardmembers will eventually have to decide [what the ultimate target will be](#) as part of the fare change process.

What the farebox recovery target is set at will be important because it will drive future fare hike discussions as well.

Status quo distance-based fares

Currently, Sound Transit uses a distance-based fare structure on Link. Regular adult riders are charged a base fare of \$2.25 but because the fare is also distanced-based, an additional \$0.05 is charged per mile rounded up or down to the nearest \$0.25. Thus, a one-mile ride is still \$2.25 whereas a six-mile ride is \$2.50.

As a consequence of the Link system set to grow substantially in the next few years, riders will be able to travel further than ever on light rail. That complicates matters because the distance-based fare matrix will become more complex and top fare prices could grow by more than a dollar. Sticking with the current distance-based fare system could become quite unwieldy for riders to understand and pricier than flat fares for riders going the longest distances.

Under the scenario of retaining distance-based fares, Sound Transit is planning to increase the base fare by \$0.25 or \$0.50 for a regular adult — that’s still to be determined. That would translate to a fare structure ranging from \$2.50 to \$4.50 or \$2.75 to \$4.75 once the Lynnwood, Redmond, and Federal Way Link extensions open. These rates could wind up being higher than comparable tram and bus service. Regular adult fares cost \$2.25 on Seattle Streetcar, \$2.75 on King County Metro buses, and \$3.25 on ST Express buses. But unlike Link, those services all use flat fare structures.

Current Link fare table for adult fares

Station	Angle Lake	Airport - SeaTac	Tukwila International Blvd	Rainier Beach	Othello	Columbia City	Mount Baker	Beacon Hill	SODO	Stadium	International District	Pioneer Square	University Street	Westlake	Capitol Hill	University of Washington	U District	Roosevelt	Northgate
Angle Lake		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.50
Airport - SeaTac	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.50
Tukwila International Blvd	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.25
Rainier Beach	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00
Othello	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 3.00
Columbia City	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 3.00
Mount Baker	\$ 3.00	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75
Beacon Hill	\$ 3.00	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75
SODO	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75
Stadium	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.75
International District	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.75
Pioneer Square	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.75
University Street	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.75
Westlake	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.75
Capitol Hill	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50
University of Washington	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.00	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50
U District	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.25	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.25	\$ 2.50
Roosevelt	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.00	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25		\$ 2.25
Northgate	\$ 3.50	\$ 3.50	\$ 3.25	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.75	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.25	\$ 2.25	

Matrix showing the current Link fare schedule by station pair. (Sound Transit)

could be more equitable than flat fares but also more simplistic than distanced-based fares. Sound Transit did have a **form of zone-based fares several years ago with ST Express**.



Edited Sound Transit taxing district and subarea map showing where fare zones could be established. (Sound Transit, edits by Stephen Fesler)

A zone-based fare system could essentially mimic the Sound Transit taxing district subareas, except with two zones in the North King County Subarea. Riders traveling within one zone or two zones could be charged the lowest fare. Riders traveling within more than two zones would pay incrementally higher fares.

In terms for fares, the following table offers a potential fare structure for this zone-based system:

Zones	A	B	C	D	E	F
A	\$2.75	\$2.75	\$3.50	\$4.75	\$4.75	\$6.75
B	\$2.75	\$2.75	\$2.75	\$3.50	\$3.50	\$4.75
C	\$3.50	\$2.75	\$2.75	\$2.75	\$2.75	\$3.50
D	\$4.75	\$3.50	\$2.75	\$2.75	\$3.50	\$4.75
E	\$4.75	\$3.50	\$2.75	\$3.50	\$2.75	\$2.75
F	\$6.75	\$4.75	\$3.50	\$4.75	\$2.75	\$2.75

This structure would favor short- and medium-distance trips over longer ones, by keeping fares lower for most trip pairs and charging higher fares for the longest trips. This approach offers a more regionally equitable structure while keeping fare matrices relatively simple. This type of simple fare structure could also fit relatively neatly into fare-capping.

While Sound Transit is not considering zone-based fares, the agency is running an [online open house through October 22](#). Riders can provide feedback on the distance-based and flat fare alternatives as well as comments asking for consideration of a more regionally equitable zone-based system.

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Article Author

Stephen Fesler

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Stephen is a professional urban planner in Puget Sound with a passion for sustainable, livable, and diverse cities. He is especially interested in how policies, regulations, and programs can promote positive outcomes for communities. With stints in great cities like Bellingham and Cork, Stephen currently lives in Seattle. He primarily covers land use and transportation issues and has been with The Urbanist since 2014.

